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DRAFT DCI BRIEFING FOR
VINSON SUBCOMMITTEE

1 August 1964

SOUTH VIETNAM

(Map, South Vietnam)

✓ I. In South Vietnam, the pace of the fighting has been greatly intensified. During July, the Viet Cong made ^{major} twelve attacks using at least one battalion--more major attacks in July alone than there were in the first five months this year, or in the first nine months of 1963. The twelve battalion attacks, combined with eight attacks by one or more companies of Viet Cong regulars, represent the most aggressive level of Viet Cong military activity to date. The high rate of terrorism, sabotage, and harassment was maintained at the same time.

- A. In part, this stepped-up fighting may be intended to welcome General Taylor, and to point up the fact that ten years after the Geneva Accords ended the war against France in July 1954, Vietnam is still partitioned.
1. In addition, the step-up reflects the onset of the summer monsoon season, when the rains hamper guerrilla movement less than they slow down government reaction.

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2. To some extent, however, the Viet Cong activity suggests that some of the improved government operations are beginning to hurt--particularly those in the vicinity of Viet Cong base areas or infiltration routes. Several of the larger Viet Cong attacks in July have been directed at Ranger and Special Forces units which have been used in such operations.

II. South Vietnamese commanders in the northernmost provinces claim that there now are regular North Vietnamese military units south of the demarcation line. Hanoi has the capability to move units in and out of South Vietnam, as it does in Laos, but we have no supporting evidence and are not inclined to accept the presence in South Vietnam of units directly subordinate to the North Vietnamese army.

A. At least two prisoners captured this month, however, are native northerners. One claims that his entire unit of about 120 men, part of a regular North Vietnamese division, was infiltrated piecemeal into South Vietnam

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and split up in groups of 10 or 12 men, possibly destined for regular Viet Cong units.

✓1. This suggests to us that Hanoi may have used up the pool of able-bodied southerners who withdrew to the north with the Viet Minh at the time of partition, and that Hanoi now is prepared, whatever the international complications, to stiffen the Viet Cong with PAVN regulars who have never been in South Vietnam.

✓B. MACV has recently increased its estimate of Viet Cong hard core regular strength from 25,000 to a range of 28,000 to 34,000. This does not represent a sudden reinforcement, but the acceptance of new formations which have been identified over the past five or six months. MACV does estimate that Viet Cong strength in the four northern provinces has increased by about 13 percent.

1. We are prepared to believe that there may be more VC battalions than our OB has been carrying--rather than regular PAVN units--in the provinces nearest the demarcation line.

C. Another rather ominous note is the increasing

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capability and readiness of the Viet Cong regulars to stand and fight against South Vietnamese regulars. This spring one such running action went on for five days. The Viet Cong still set the pace of the fighting, and hold the initiative.

III. Government operations have been stepped up, and in many cases are better planned and better executed than they were six months ago.

A. There are now 20 to 25 major operations--involving a battalion or more--in progress on any given day, and small-unit actions have run as high as 2,000 a day.

1. The trouble is that most of these operations do not make contact with the enemy, and some that do are ambushed on the enemy's initiative. The South Vietnamese just cannot be persuaded to put out adequate patrols when they move.
2. Also, too many of the larger operations are one-shot search-and-clear operations, which do not contribute to lasting pacification. There are only 11 clear-and-hold operations in progress.

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- B. The desertion rate among government troops has dropped off from the painful peak it reached earlier this year, but the other statistics on casualties and weapons losses remain generally unfavorable to the government side and we still list 14 provinces as critical.
- C. New machinery has just been set up, both in the South Vietnamese government and in the US Embassy, for a coordinated concentration on the task of pacification in the most critical provinces right around Saigon. The necessary committees and task forces began to come into being just before Ambassador Lodge's return, and it is still too early to predict their effectiveness, but the country team and the Vietnamese both have high hopes.

IV. In the political arena, whatever honeymoon General Khanh may have enjoyed when he first took over has long since ended. We have been getting increasing rumors of coup plotting and--during the past two weeks--reports that some major governmental reorganization is impending.

- A. None of the coup rumors has been firm enough

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or detailed enough yet to cause a state of alarm, but we cannot dismiss them lightly. One more coup--or the removal of Khanh by other means such as assassination--might well be the end of any effective South Vietnamese resistance to the Communists.

The latest reporting suggests that Khanh has been undergoing a "crisis of confidence"

stemming from internal opposition and frustration over the lack of progress, and that one or another of the factions among his military colleagues may force him to make changes or to relinquish command without the disruptive effects of a coup.

1. According to these reports, Khanh would be succeeded either by his predecessor, General "Big" Minh, or by Defense Minister Khiem, who has been one of the mainstays of the Khanh regime. Khiem has figured in many of the reports of alleged coup plotting.

2. For the moment, however, Khanh still seems to be in control.

C. The open differences between Khanh and US representatives over the "march to the north" theme has an obvious role in the present confusion.

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1. On the one hand the show of disagreement probably encourages his opponents to believe that the time is favorable for a move against Khanh.

2. [] tells us that his talk about carrying the war to North Vietnam is designed to rally public support. He implies that the South Vietnamese people will lose heart if some action is not taken soon promising an eventual end to the fighting, either by expanding the war to the north or by negotiation.

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D. Khanh may hope--perhaps by unilateral South Vietnamese action--to force the US to commit its power more fully in Southeast Asia by involvement in attacks on North Vietnam and possibly even Communist China.

1. We have some reports, however, suggesting that Khanh's purpose is to give the South Vietnamese--once we have rejected any expansion of the fighting--the justification to reach a negotiated settlement with the Communists--a settlement which would necessarily involve US withdrawal from Southeast Asia.

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V. The outlook in Southeast Asia is for continued and intensified Viet Cong military pressure in South Vietnam, and continued attempts in Laos to expand the Communist position there by any means short of those calculated to risk outside intervention in force. Meanwhile the Communists and a fairly potent array of non-Communist elements like the French will push major diplomatic and propaganda efforts, urging the neutralization of the entire area.

A. The Communists are hard at work portraying the withdrawal of the United States from Southeast Asia as inevitable, in the hope that first our allies and then the United States itself will despair of either a negotiated or a military solution.

B. One of the main Peiping themes is that the US is only feigning determination for political purposes during the election campaign, and that after November the paper tiger will give up and go home.

1. (Incidentally, the Communists used the same line in Latin America about our attitude toward Castro, in hopes of discouraging firm OAS action against Cuba.)

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- C. This makes us wonder whether the Chinese Communists and the North Vietnamese believe the signals we have been sending them for more than two months, trying to tell them in a variety of ways that Laos and South Vietnam are of vital concern to us and that the continuing heavy Communist pressure in Southeast Asia is bringing about an intolerably critical situation.
- D. The Communists certainly have received the messages, as they have acknowledged them with propaganda blasts. They probably believe, however, that our hard line is in large part a political maneuver. It will probably be difficult to change their assessment before Election Day.
- E. Peiping and Hanoi may also calculate that only some spectacular Communist success would evoke the threatened major US response, and that they need not worry about continuing the conflict at present levels.
- F. At the same time, they have begun sending signals back to us that they too regard the Laotian and Vietnamese situations as vital,

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implying that the only safe way out of a volatile situation is to negotiate on Communist terms.

VI. Peiping and Hanoi apparently have made preparations to provide combat aircraft for North Vietnam if the military situation warrants.

A. The Communist leaders met in China last month, probably to discuss the situation in Southeast Asia and the defense of North Vietnam against possible attack.

1. Hanoi is highly vulnerable to air attack.

It has no combat aircraft, and only light and medium anti-aircraft artillery, backed up by a modest early warning radar system.

2. Last August, 36 Chinese jet fighters (MIG-17s) were moved to Mengtzu Airfield, about 45 miles from the Vietnamese border. This force can be augmented quickly.

3. Since mid-July an unusual number of transport flights have been noted between Hanoi and Mengtzu, and the Chinese jets based at Mengtzu recently appear to have made some shallow penetrations of North

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Vietnamese airspace during practice flights.

B. Hanoi's newly constructed airfield at Phuc Yen has recently become operational.

1. Aerial photography of 12 July revealed 10 transport aircraft there. Construction is continuing on auxiliary facilities.
2. Phuc Yen and at least 3 other fields in North Vietnam are capable of handling jet aircraft up to medium bombers.

C. [redacted] who recently returned from training in the Soviet Union indicate that more than 500 North Vietnamese have been undergoing aviation training at various bases there.

1. Approximately 200 to 300 of these students are said to be pilot trainees. Some of them have trained in jet light bombers and fighters.
2. There are tenuous indications that Hanoi may have called home some of its pilot trainees early in July.

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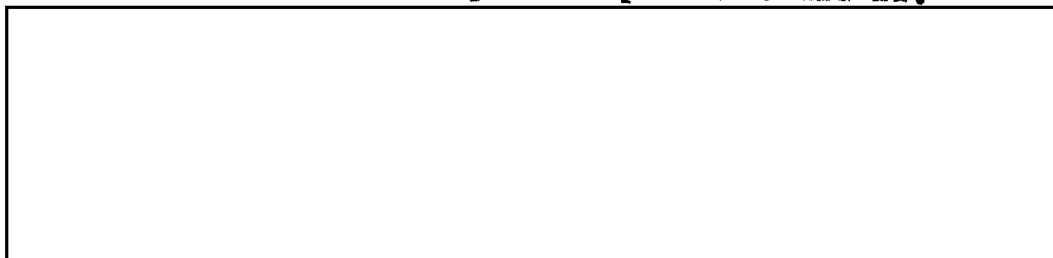
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B. Although the MIG-21 is substantially superior to other fighters in the Chinese Air Force, the handful we have seen so far will not appreciably increase China's air defense capability. China now has an estimated 1,900 jet fighters. These are mainly MIG-15s and MIG-17s, but there are about 75 MIG-19s.

C. Communist China is not believed capable at present of producing the supersonic MIG-21.



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D. The state of Sino-Soviet relations since 1961 makes it doubtful that the planes were supplied by the Soviet Union after that time.

1. It is possible that the Soviet Union began supplying these aircraft before military cooperation was suspended, and that it took the Chinese until mid-1963 to put them into operational use.

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2. The Soviets have supplied MIG-21s to most of the Eastern European countries as well as to Cuba, India, Indonesia, Egypt, Iraq, and North Korea.

VIII.

The Unsuccessful torpedo boat attack on the USS Maddox on 2 August was apparently planned and ordered by land-based authorities in North Vietnam.

1. At least one of the three torpedo boats was severely damaged and may have been sunk. The others were probably hit by fire from the Maddox or from supporting US aircraft.

B. North Vietnamese naval entities have displayed increasing sensitivity to US and South Vietnamese naval activity in the Gulf of Tonkin during the past few months.

1. The DRV authorities may have believed that the Maddox was involved in the harassing raid conducted by South Vietnamese craft against the North Vietnamese coast on the night of 30 July.

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C. In the light of North Vietnamese sensitivity to naval activity in the Gulf of Tonkin, it is thought likely that orders have been issued to DRV military authorities to take such action as they see fit against intruding craft. Further attacks on US units operating in the area are thus possible.

1. The Communist bloc may attempt to use the Maddox incident to stir international apprehension over possible consequences of US and South Vietnamese military activity directed against North Vietnam.

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